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## When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow: Grant Wood and Christian Petersen Murals

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entertaining read, clearly written, and a fine illustration of the history of travel in the period. The book is suitable for classroom use in courses in women's studies, the twentieth-century West, or travel, although students may be tempted to disentangle the narratives to follow the story that most interests them.

*When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow: Grant Wood and Christian Petersen Murals*, by Lea Rosson DeLong. Ames: University Museums, Iowa State University, 2006. xlii, 398 pp. Illustrations (some color), notes, appendixes, chronology, exhibition checklist, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewer Galin Berrier is adjunct instructor in history at Des Moines Area Community College. He has been a docent at the Des Moines Art Center since 1997.

*When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow* was published to coincide with the exhibition by that name organized by the Brunnier Art Museum at Iowa State University in the fall of 2006. DeLong is the leading authority on Depression-era art in 1930s Iowa, including the work of both Iowa native Grant Wood and Iowa State artist-in-residence Christian Petersen. The work under review here is an in-depth examination of the Grant Wood and Christian Petersen murals at Iowa State as well as the first historical study of the short-lived Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) in Iowa.

DeLong's first chapter is devoted to the PWAP, less well-known than other New Deal art programs that produced post office and courthouse murals in Iowa and elsewhere. Already well known nationally thanks to his famous painting *American Gothic* (1930), Grant Wood was selected as PWAP director in Iowa. Although Wood was not known heretofore for murals, Iowa State's president, Raymond M. Hughes, had already commissioned him to paint murals for the college. Wood "saw mural painting as not only a public form of art, but one that could disseminate a philosophy, in his case, Regionalism" (9).

In selecting artists for the project, he was at pains to include, along with "modern" artists who had been part of the Stone City art colony, members of the "conservative" faction, especially students of Charles Atherton Cumming of Des Moines and later the University of Iowa. The artists worked in a studio converted from a swimming pool in the Old Armory, or Library Annex, on the university campus in Iowa City. Wood believed that a "harmonious tone . . . had existed in the swimming pool studio" (35) and was shocked to learn that a petition bearing the signatures of 21 artists had been sent to Washington, D.C., objecting to his leadership of any future federal arts projects in Iowa (41).

He would never again have anything to do with government art projects or with any of his former PWAP colleagues.

In her second chapter DeLong shows how Iowa State, a land grant college dedicated to the practical arts of agriculture, engineering, and home economics, came to be noted for its Art on Campus program, which has grown to become the nation's largest campus public art collection (334–35). She gives much of the credit for this to President Hughes, who not only arranged for Christian Petersen to become the first permanent campus artist-in-residence in the United States, but for a time supplemented Petersen's modest salary from his own pocket. Chapter three contains a detailed examination of the mural cycle *When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow* and its relationship to Grant Wood's other work. In chapter four DeLong discusses the "Iowa Cooperative," which produced those murals. She also provides sketches of the individual artists. Two of the most important were John Bloom, a native of DeWitt, Iowa, who also painted the post office murals in DeWitt and Tipton, Iowa, and Francis McCray, who was most responsible after Wood himself for executing *When Tillage Begins*. McCray also supervised the execution of another Iowa State mural, *Breaking the Prairie*, the subject of chapter five. Both were installed in Parks Library and complement each other, but *Breaking the Prairie* was not completed until 1939, several years after the PWAP ended.

DeLong's final chapter is devoted to Christian Petersen's sculpted mural *The History of Dairying*, a seven-panel series of low reliefs designed specifically for the courtyard of the Dairy Industry Building at Iowa State. The dairying panels were drawn in the swimming pool studio in Iowa City but cast in terra cotta at Ames. Petersen's original concept reflected the late nineteenth-century Beaux Arts style in which he had previously worked, but Wood apparently influenced him to drastically modify it in a "modernist" style to better harmonize with the Parks Library murals. When it was installed, Wood visited the Dairy courtyard with Petersen "and paced back and forth in front of the seven-panel series. Finally, he stood back and announced that the reliefs were too low, an opinion that annoyed Petersen considerably" (318).

The Grant Wood and Christian Petersen murals at Iowa State have been admirably preserved by the university, but other New Deal-era murals in Iowa have not been so fortunate. In the late 1940s a 110-foot-long mural at the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines was torn up and used for scrap on the orders of Fair Board secretary Lloyd Cunningham, who said, "The mural wasn't art; it was WPA" (52n). DeLong's book reminds us of the remarkable artistic heritage of which we are

the custodians, and of our obligation to preserve and bequeath it unimpaired to future generations. It is a work of impeccable scholarship, gracefully written, that should appeal to both art scholars and students of Iowa's history.

*Our Daily Bread: Wages, Workers, and the Political Economy of the American West*, by Geoff Mann. Cultural Studies of the United States. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. xviii, 245 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$59.95 cloth, \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Gregory R. Zieren is professor of history at Austin Peay State University. His writing includes "German Contemporary Studies of American Labor, 1865-1914" (*Labor History*, 1995) and "Cedar Rapids Packinghouse Workers in the CIO" (*Palimpsest*, 1995).

This slender volume is an ambitious exercise in crafting a new definition of wages based on the Marxian-Hegelian dialectic and insights gained from the work of economic geographers. The author, a Marxist professor of economic geography, employs three case studies from western labor history in the twentieth century to illuminate his theoretical constructs. He divides the book into two theoretical chapters, three historical ones, a sixth chapter demonstrating the fit between theory and practice, and a conclusion. The case studies, of hitherto little-known unions on the West Coast, are the heart of the book and offer a welcome addition to the literature on labor history. Readers may admire the erudition, even elegance, of the author's theoretical work, but it will not persuade many beyond those already steeped in the Marxian tradition.

In his introduction and first chapter Mann clarifies why the Far West inspired his work. The West of popular mythology is always white and masculine, so race and gender issues become an overlay on the landscape. The West first industrialized through natural resource exploitation, and high wages were a reflection of the region's labor scarcity. At the same time, exploitation, whether in mining or lumber camps, often took place in isolated places and company towns where the contradictions between capitalists and workers were at their starkest. The West, furthermore, had more than its share of labor radicalism, from the days of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in the early years of the twentieth century to the San Francisco longshoremen in the great strike of 1934 and beyond. How to make sense of this complex set of influences on wages is Mann's objective.

In chapter two he dissects, and rejects, alternative economic interpretations of the wage. The focus of neoclassical economics on supply